



Advocates for Rural Broadband

Jerry Piper  
President  
Kelly Worthington  
Executive Director

November 28, 2018

***Ex Parte Notice***

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

**RE: Promoting Telehealth for Low-Income Consumers (WC Docket No. 18-213)**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On Monday, November 26, 2018 the undersigned with WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband Association (“WTA”) and Sarah Tyree, Vice President, CoBank met with Rashann Duvall, Jodie Griffin, Ryan Palmer, and Christian Hoefly of the Wireline Competition Bureau to discuss the Commission’s Notice of Inquiry in the above referenced proceeding as well as their experiences in telemedicine.

Ms. Tyree provided an overview of the telemedicine pilot program CoBank launched in January 2018 in Southwest Georgia that focused on 100 low-income patients with Type II diabetes. The benefits of the Georgia pilot have included increased patient and healthcare provider satisfaction; dramatically improved engagement between health care providers and the patients and the early results are showing significant cost savings. The final report of the Georgia pilot program will be released in February 2019. Due to the positive results of the initial pilot, CoBank decided to support replicating the pilot program in additional rural communities. CoBank, the WTA Foundation, and Perry Health have formed an alliance to launch the Rural Health Initiative (RHI), a joint nationwide initiative to improve access to high-quality healthcare in rural America. By leveraging CoBank’s and WTA Foundation’s deep relationships and commitment to rural America and Perry Health’s user-friendly, secure technology, the RHI looks to enable hospitals, clinics, and/or behavior/mental health agencies to sustainably provide high quality care beyond brick and mortar facilities to address their community’s unique needs. Three additional pilot programs will be announced in the first quarter of 2019 and additional pilots are under development. Ms. Tyree explained that the low-income households need affordable telecommunications and information services to benefit from telehealth, so no telehealth solution will be viable without supporting the broadband infrastructure to deliver universal service in rural high cost areas.

The undersigned on behalf of WTA referred to the reply comments that WTA filed in this proceeding, which touted the importance of the USF High Cost program in ensuring that rural Americans can use telehealth solutions.<sup>1</sup> WTA is concerned that if the Commission makes broadband deployment a major goal of any future pilot program, it may result in unnecessary overbuilding. Instead, WTA recommended that the Commission focus more on the adoption of telehealth solutions rather than broadband deployment. Further, WTA noted that

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<sup>1</sup> Reply Comments of WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband, WC Docket No. 18-213, filed on October 10, 2018.

considering the relative lower cost of CoBank's telehealth program compared to the Commission's proposed funding amount of \$5 million per project in the Notice of Inquiry, the Commission should consider lowering the funding amounts so that more programs would be able to participate in a future pilot program.

Thank you for your attention to this correspondence. Pursuant to Section 1.1206 of the Commission's rules, a copy of this letter is being filed via ECFS.

Sincerely,

/s/ Bill Durdach

Bill Durdach

Director of Government Affairs

WTA – Advocates for Rural Broadband

cc: Rashann Duvall  
Jodie Griffin  
Christian Hoefly  
Ryan Palmer